



The National Archives and Records Administration

The ELECTRONIC RECORDS ARCHIVES

NARA's Mission

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) ensures, for the citizen, the President, the Congress, and the Courts, access to records that document the rights of citizens, the actions of Federal officials, and the national experience. NARA plays a key role in fostering effective and responsible government through management of the records in all three branches of the Federal Government and through sustained access to historically valuable records in the National Archives and the Presidential Libraries.

The Challenge of Electronic Records

Federal agencies are creating an exponentially increasing volume of diverse and complex digital records. As electronic record formats become more and more sophisticated, they grow increasingly difficult to manage and evolve more rapidly, making older technologies and formats obsolete. The more complex the materials, the more difficult they are to preserve, and no current system exists to preserve these digital records over time. Therefore, many electronic records will be lost.

The Electronic Records Archives (ERA) System

ERA will provide NARA with the capability to authentically preserve and provide access to any kind of electronic record free from dependence on any specific hardware or software. Our research and development have provided us with knowledge that supports new technologies to **transfer, preserve, manage, and provide sustained access** to all types of electronic records.

The ERA System will ensure that anyone, at any time, from any place, has access to the best tools to find and use the electronic records that NARA preserves. This system will enable NARA to fulfill its mission in the future and to improve its services to other Federal agencies, researchers, genealogists, veterans, students, and teachers. ERA will make it easier for Federal agencies, Congress, and the Courts to transfer their electronic records to NARA. Examples of ERA's many benefits are to:

- Enable intelligence agencies to better store and share vital historical security information;
- Access geographic information systems and virtual reality models used in some patent applications;
- Ensure the electronic records documenting drugs and related research data are accessible over time to the Food and Drug Administration;
- Permit the Federal Aviation Administration full access to electronic aircraft safety records;
- Facilitate the repair of the Department of the Navy's damaged ships, whose design records are only available as electronic computer aided design (CAD) files; and
- Share drug application information between pharmaceutical companies and the Drug Enforcement Administration.



"...This is an exciting time for the National Archives and for its partners. Together, we are creating a capability that does not exist today – a capability that will ensure, for our great, great grandchildren access to the records of our time. We have extraordinary staff of archivists, contractors, and partners to help us meet the challenge – and we will."

***-- L. Reynolds Cahoon, Assistant Archivist for
Human Resources and Information Services***

ERA Program Successes

Since 1998, the Electronic Records Archives (ERA) Program has partnered with its key users and stakeholders from Federal agencies, government organizations, academia, the private sector, professional associations, and other nations, to develop its vision of the *Archives of the Future*.

- 1998** ✓ NARA receives seed money to engage government and private sector research partners.
✓ Initial break-through on digital preservation research.
- 1999** ✓ First proof-of-concept through research results are released.
- 2000** ✓ NARA establishes the ERA Program Office.
- 2001** ✓ Research results on the preservation of Senate records are delivered.
- 2002** ✓ ERA System requirements are developed.
✓ ERA Research Program supports research with new partners at the National Center for Supercomputer Applications (NCSA)
- 2003** ✓ ERA Research Program initiates operation of the Virtual Archives Lab.
✓ NARA releases a Request-for-Proposal for ERA System Design and Prototypes.
- 2004** ✓ NARA selects two contractors (Harris Corporation and Lockheed Martin Corporation), to individually develop design specifications for the ERA system.
- 2005** ✓ NARA selects the best design and development team to build ERA, initiating the first of five increments to develop the system:
 - **Increment 1** will require two years of development to provide system functions for managing, preserving and providing online access to NARA's electronic records,
 - **First use** (*Initial Operating Capability*) of the ERA System is expected by FY07
 - **Four more annual increments** will each provide additional functions, technology enhancements, and advanced preservation techniques.
 - **Full use** (*Full Operating Capability*) of the ERA System is expected by 2011.

